

Statement of
The Honorable Frank D. Lucas, Chairman
Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Thursday, April 8th, 2004
University of Hawaii
Hilo, Hawaii

Field hearing to review agricultural conservation programs

Aloha. Good morning and thank you for attending the Subcommittee's second field hearing this Spring. We are happy to be here at the University of Hawaii's Komohana Agriculture Complex. A few weeks ago we were in Athens, Georgia discussing agricultural research with Congressman Max Burns. Congressman Case's invitation to come to Hilo and review agricultural conservation programs affords us the opportunity to see how an 80 percent increase in conservation spending is benefiting agricultural producers here in Hawaii. You learn in Washington that sometimes it is much easier to find out how programs are working if you leave the Beltway and actually get out to where the programs are being implemented. I want to thank Congressman Case for hosting us today.

Hawaii has a long and diverse history of agricultural production. The fact that fruits, rice, hogs, cattle, nuts, coffee beans, sugarcane, forestry products, flowers and nursery products either are or have been major agricultural products shows just a glimpse of how necessary conservation programs are to give producers the tools to grow crops in an environmentally sound manner.

Captain Cook brought the first hogs to Hawaii in 1778 and the Sandalwood trade started in 1790 which demonstrates that native and non native products were already beginning to coexist in the late 18th century. As time passed and new non native species were introduced, the increase in farmed acreage increased dramatically.

It is interesting that Hawaii was one of the first states to realize how important it was to balance agricultural production with sound research and conservation. Hawaii created its Board of Agriculture and Forestry in 1905 and the University of Hawaii started its own state funded extension service in 1919 which happens to be nine years before Congress created the Federal extension system.

I would also note that there are numerous climatic differences on the Islands. Here on the Big Island we are currently on the wet side of the Island. While we would like to find the wet side of Oklahoma, I am most certain that my home state is more like the dry side of the Island. These differences in climate combined with the numerous crops and volcanic soil types make Hawaii quite unique among the other States and probably require different types of conservation practices than what I am used to seeing. I hope to learn a little bit about what is needed in Hawaii so that I can better understand your needs during the next Farm Bill, which I might add is only two or three year away from being written.

The last Farm Bill greatly increased our conservation funding. In FY 03, Hawaii received 37 EQIP contracts worth \$2,110,236 but there were still many contracts left unfunded. I believe that Mr. Yamamoto will enlighten us as to how the new funds are helping Hawaii increase participation in all of the Farm Bill conservation programs.

In FY03, my home state of Oklahoma had 10,938 EQIP contracts worth \$122 million that were not able to be funded. While 2004 funding levels have helped offset that backlog further, we must be diligent and showcase how important these new funds have been to producers. I know that interest in conservation programs is growing in Hawaii, and we want to the programs to be able to work for Hawaii's producers.

I look forward today's testimony as we will hear from those in charge of implementing the programs and those that are using the programs.